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ABSTRACT

This speech defines the planning process involved in the development of a community-based corrections project. The correctional planners attempt to strike a realistic balance between the need for incarceration of offenders and the need for rehabilitation and treatment. The multiple influences available through community corrections are seen as offering more possibilities for innovation and more effective retraining of offenders. The recommendations of the program planners are (1) the incarceration of as few offenders as possible; (2) the development of small, decentralized specialized treatment centers; (3) the use of individualized sentencing procedures based on social-psychological study of each offender; and (4) the development and use of diversionary methods to steer first-time offenders away from the criminal justice system. The process of developing these recommendations into program guidelines is briefly traced, and the obstacles to program implementation are described. (SJL)

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PLANNING A COMMUNITY-BASED CORRECTIONS PROGRAM*

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Presented at the National Convention of the American Psychological Association in a symposium, Are Alternatives to Incarceration Needed?, in Montreal, Canada, on August 27, 1973.

> "Trying to build this new jail is sort of like getting cancer; it keeps getting bigger and bigger, and it won't go away!"
> -- Unnamed public official, 1973

The harassed politician who felt that jail-building was like getting cancer is just one of a widening circle of officials, judges, and citizens in our community who are finding out the hard way that establishing new corrections facilities can be a baffling challenge. Jails are one of our most deeply rooted institutions, and the attempt to change the thinking of those who support them can become an exercise in futility for the social change-oriented professional. This paper is a personal commentary by a participant in the planning process, an attempt to chronicle the agonies and ecstacies of the Cincinnati-Hamilton County area in trying to build a corrections network worthy of the 20th Century. It may be useful because most of our urban areas have almost identical problems in modernizing criminal corrections facilities, and a case study may have utility for you.

The Cincinnati Workhouse is now 105 years old, an incredible mausoleum of crenelated towers, crumbling masonry, and tiers of tiny barred cells. It houses from 300 to 700 prisoners, mainly for misdemeanors. There are no toilets in the cells, and a tin can with a splash of disinfectant serves for a toilet. The shortcomings of this ancient jail were the subject of a class action law suit brought by Legal Aid, which has already resulted in many needed repairs. However, the wisdom of spending tax money on such an antiquated facility makes repair a dubious proposition. The management and staffing are competent, and Workhouse personnel probably do the best they can with the limited manpower and facilities provided. It is ironic that if the staff were less competent and more abuses prevalent, that perhaps replacement of the Workhouse might be proceeding with more dispatch.

It has been a decade now since the Hamilton County Commissioners authorized the first planning study to replace the Workhouse. A well-known consultant was hired, who, after a rather cursory survey, recommended a bigger and better jail, based upon projections of population growth for the Cincinnati area. Instead of 700 prisoners, we should then house 1,000 or more in a massive central facility, with mass feeding and mass

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custodial care, located in a rural area. Such is the brand of thinking which produced our state mental hospitals, those monolithic medical monstrosities which continue to deface the countryside. The consultant's report received little attention, and was quietly filed away for five years.

In 1969, the present planning effort was initiated, spearheaded by a citizen's group called the Citizen's Committee for Justice and Corrections. This local group is a conglomerate of volunteers, citizens, judges, elected officials and representatives of a broad span of social agencies, held together by a common concern for more humane treatment of juvenile and adult offenders. The Citizen's Committee was chaired by an inexhaustible and talented woman whose determination almost singlehandedly forced an "updating" of the original consultant's planning report.

The new planning project was made possible by funds from the Federal Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, with matching funds from Hamilton County. After the new planning project was approved in Washington, matching funds were denied by the County Commissioners who were in the midst of a budget crisis. At this point the Citizen's Committee raised the matching funds from their own pockets, and presented these monies to the County. Even then, the Commissioners approved the new planning project by a close vote. But the new project was off to a faltering start. I present this information to demonstrate the necessity for a determined "constituency" devoted to the cause of criminal corrections, if the complex machinery of public government is to be persuaded to move.

The new planning project was assigned to the Institute for Governmental Research, a newly formed Institute at the University of Cincinnati. The new planning team was largely recruited from faculty of the University, and included a sociologist, a psychologist (R.B.M.), a psychiatrist, a political scientist who served as Project Director, a law professor and various corrections experts from around the country. Our general strategy was to utilize the credibility and knowledge of local on-scene experts, fortified and enriched by field visits to promising correctional institutions around the country, and through the aid of well-known criminologists of national reputation.

I shall not dwell upon the thousands of hours of bookwork, field visits, surveys, argumentation, and skull-busting that went into two major reports to the County Commissioners during the two years of the planning project. Perhaps the most controversial and crucial set of recommendations was in the first report called, Alternatives to Incarceration. In essence, we turned the original planning report on its head. Instead of a bigger jail, we recommended that as few offenders as possible be incarcerated. Instead of a massive jail complex, we recommended small, decentralized special treatment centers for different types of offenders. We recommended individualized sentencing procedures based upon social-psychological study of each offender prior to sentencing with regard to available rehabilitative measures. We recommended diversionary methods to steer first-time offenders away from the criminal justice system, rather than deeper into it. We recommended that offenders required more extensive em-

bedding in the social institutions of their community, and not isolation.

Ever present in the minds of the planning team was the recognition that jails, once constructed, tend to "freeze" the alternatives used by judges; the bigger and more modern the jail, the more difficult it becomes to attempt rehabilitation within the community. Jails, like mental hospitals, tend to stay filled once they are built. The close parallel between the move toward community mental health centers and the move toward community corrections centers is beginning to assume heroic proportions, and should give mental health professionals a ready point of contact with criminal corrections. The deleterious effects in creating dependency through prolonged hospitalization are matched by similar effects by prolonged prisonization.

One of the most difficult struggles for correctional planners is to try to strike a realistic balance between the need for incarceration of offenders and the need for rehabilitation and treatment. I must confess a deep pessimism about prison reform from within the system. It seems to me that the forces for inertia and status quo within prison administrations are so deep and intractable that significant changes must come from outside. Community corrections is a relatively untested proposition, but it seems more hopeful if only because of its youth and vigor. The possibilities for innovation and more effective re-training of offenders seem more viable within communities where multiple influences can be brought to bear more readily. Trying out rehabilitative methods within a prison usually seems to be an exercise in frustration.

In dealing with a jail population characterized by short sentences and low to medium security needs, we finally recommended an in-town jail facility, designed as part of a multiple-purpose facility to be utilized by probation officers, psychiatric personnel, and court personnel. We reasoned that a jail close to court facilities would enhance transportation of prisoners, encourage use of work release programs, make family visits easier, and bring the function of the jail into closer proximity with other correctional programs. The jail would be administered as part of a centralized Department of Corrections, which would unite previously separated administrative units, and encourage a more cohesive effort toward offender correction. Thus, the judge would have at his disposal in geographically close proximity a full and flexible range of alternatives in prescribing sentences, based upon individual studies of each offender by probation and psychiatric clinic personnel.

In a brief presentation, I cannot do justice to the details of our proposals, but I hope that I have revealed their essence. Our completed planning reports were next fed to a blue-ribbon committee appointed by the County Commissioners, consisting of judges, heads of all corrections agencies concerned, and several prominent citizens. After many months of debate and modification of the planning project reports, a set of recommendations from the blue-ribbon committee went to the County Commissioners, who approved the plans as a blueprint for what had now become a county-wide, community-based corrections program.

The planning project and the blue-ribbon committee made certain assumptions about the courts, probation departments, and jail facilities eventually coming under the administration of the County, although the Workhouse and Municipal Courts were operated by the City. A meeting was called between City Councilmen and County Commissioners, which was held on "neutral ground", a businessmen's club located midway between the County Court House and City Hall. In a delicate negotiating session, an agreement was reached in principle that the County would eventually take over administration of all Courts and correctional facilities, a necessary preliminary to a coordinated Department of Corrections. In addition, a "public safety" bond issue was placed on the ballot for voter approval which would include monies for construction of the new facilities. An architect was hired to carry out pre-architectural studies recommending sites, costs, and further detailing of programs.

Phase III was in operation. From this point difficulties began to mount. Up to this point, planners had kept a low profile, meeting with elected officials and correction agency personnel to explain and interpret the thrust of the new planning, and avoiding public statements. Support for the new corrections facilities was bipartisan, and mass media treated the planning in a factual and often sympathetic manner. However, in Phase III, voter approval had to be sought for a large bond issue, competing priorities for Federal anti-crime money from the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration had to be resolved; the delicate bipartisan balance between political parties and between City Council and the County Commissioners could be easily polarized; a point of hard public commitment to large sums of money and program was about to be made.

The first real test of voter support was aborted. The public safety bond issue was removed from the ballot by the County Commissioners because of a competing tax levy for public schools. It was apparently removed to avoid voter rejection of the issue.

The second real test, political support, is now in jeopardy. After 18 months of pre-architectural planning and program design, the architectural team made public its report. The team's report followed closely the program guidelines I have described, which were endorsed by the County Commissioners as their blue print. However, the day after the news release on the architect's report, one of the same County Commissioners made the following statement to the press:

"(The architect's) report is a hodge-podge of half-baked theory and personal opinion containing little more than can be garnered at any social worker's tea. Someone has to draw the line on this insane dreaming when the money is just not there. I will go so far as to say that it will never be built." The Commissioner's outburst has set off a rash of replies from across the political fence in City Council. And so it goes. I shall attempt to take more careful notes at the next social worker's tea I attend, so see whether their conversation is indeed the hodge-podge it was alleged to be. But that is a test I doubt the Commissioner could pass at one of his drinking parties.

The new program guidelines so laboriously derived for use in Hamilton County do represent a startling shift in thinking for citizens and professionals alike; perhaps community corrections seems even more startling because of the 50 year cultural lag in this field caused by the shameful public neglect of the criminal offender. It is important also not to build public edifices which represent 1973 thinking, when there is every expectation that new rehabilitative methods are only beginning to prove themselves. We do not wish to perpetuate the errors of the last 100 years by prematurely freezing ideas through architectural rigidity. In effect, the planners are recommending a calculated leap into the future.

It should surprise no one that criminal rehabilitation in the community arouses fears and animosities in many persons. After all, we are proposing to change the script in one of the oldest human dramas in civilized society. The punishment of the evil-doer by the social organs of society is an ancient ritual enshrined in law and custom. Christian thinking seems hardly to have made a dent in this old principle, this chronicle of retribution. I think correctional planners are foolhardy to anticipate instant success of attempts to humanize the prison system. However, the time is overdue to start transforming these vestigial and primordial social institutions into more rational and humane endeavors. If we are indeed our brother's keepers as we sometimes claim to be, we're going to have to start putting our money where our loud mouth is.